

November 2014

Dear Friends,

Asha Deep Vidyashram has made it through the first term of this school year. Feeling fairly lost at first, I have settled back into the driver's seat and now feel well in charge of the happenings here. Here are a few of the highlights of the term.

In the strong heat of July, the smell of urine rose from the walkway outside my office window. Who could be peeing here? A couple days later a stream of liquid fell from the eave above. The culprit: a monkey. Twice we had to keep the students from proceeding to their classrooms after morning prayer. A dog had left his stinky calling card right in front of the second floor staircase. The school ground to a halt while the mess was attended to.



Thankfully, the river never rose to flood levels this year. Still, the rains caused disturbance. The back dirt road to the school was largely washed away in last year's flood. While some attempts had been made at repair, these proved useless in the face of this year's rains and rising water. Now, the children must trek down and back up a steep dirt path. When the path is dry, it is nothing more than a bit of a scramble. But, after a rain it is quite slick and presents a risk of fall. Once the students reach the top they have to make their way through 20 yards of mucky cow droppings as they proceed in front of a dairy. If this section of road is dry, it's fine. If wet . . . The alternative route takes 25 minutes longer.

We endured monsoon fevers. Some children got jaundice, some typhoid fever. One child had to have his appendix removed. One of our graduates contracted a drug resistant form of tuberculosis and had to drop out of school for this year. Still our attendance has been at a record high with over half of the children not missing more than one day in September. Now that the heat has waned we are enjoying better health. The next onslaught will be cold, cough, and stomach problems.

One day Shivani came to my office. She has studied in our school for several years, but because of a low IQ she has not been able to pass 6th grade. She initially came to say that she feels she is an outcast in class, but in the process of talking, she started pouring out the sorrows of her heart: how she is undervalued and discouraged by her parents, how she is not talented in anything -- not studies, nor dance, nor art, how she has no friends. The most surprising part was that she didn't hold anger against anyone; she just wonders why she has been dealt the life she has. I talked to her about serious options for the future. I will try to enroll her in some sewing or beautician classes. I was happy that at least she felt she could open up and share with me.

Two other girls, Moni (6th grade) and Kavita (11th grade), are sad because their parents do not support their studies. Moni's family does not give her time to complete her homework; they keep her busy with chores at home. When we asked Kavita to pay her fees, she said that if she asks her family for money, they will simply tell her to stop going to school. She said, "I wish my parents would look at my report card or even shout at me to do my homework."

Our 8th graders have been a challenge this year. Many have been irregular in attendance and effort. With a lot of energy and individual attention, we have managed to get them back on track (as of now anyway). One of the boys, Ajay, had been depressed and lethargic in class until he ultimately stopped coming altogether. When I went to talk to him, his parents complained that he was sleeping until 10 or 11 in the morning and wasting entire days. They were distraught that he was not going to school. I tried to talk to him but realized he was reticent to talk in front of his parents. Later he came to talk to me after school hours. His story was heartbreaking: after his grandfather had died about a year ago, his father had started drinking in greater quantities. His grandmother (who lives with them) has been unable to control him (she broke into tears as soon as she saw me on the visit I made to their home). The father has drunk so much that his liver is now permanently damaged. He is likely to die within the year if he does not stop drinking. While drunk, he shouts and beats his wife. Ajay was unable to concentrate in school. While his father is alive, the home situation is



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frightening. If he dies, Ajay will have to quit school because, as the elder son, he will be responsible for supporting the family. After we understood the situation, we went back to talk to Ajay's father. When he realized that his drinking was keeping his sons from studies, he promised to stop. The surprising thing is that it seems he has actually stopped! Ajay is now coming regularly . . . wearing a smile.



*Ajay with the painting he created during the art workshop. The skulls represent his home situation.*

We've had a few exciting events made possible by volunteers. One newly married couple, in Banaras for their honeymoon, gave several afternoons to the school teaching music and art to our older students. Another couple came for two days after school to teach juggling and other circus arts to interested children. With the tremendous support of a group of Dutch families, we are now (after several years' gap due to lack of funds) able to offer arts classes to our older children. Every Wednesday, each child studies either dance, singing, or art. They will stay in their chosen class until January when they will have a chance to rotate to another class. Funds for these classes have been committed for three years. Along with this, some of the Dutch families were able to visit our school on Oct 18 for a day-long art and games workshop. The group was extremely well prepared and brought several art and games supplies. Their children joined our children in creating a full gallery of art including paintings, stamped fabric, Indian motif-inspired geometric designs, and painted clay cups. In between art, the children enjoyed playing traditional Dutch games. Our visitors took the artwork back with them to display and sell at an exhibition/fundraiser for the school next January. Our students enjoyed this day so much! With so many supplies available to them, they really opened up and got creative! It was a very happy day!



*Sonu. This girl gets beaten regularly. It's a treat to see her happy.*

As a side note, it was an honor for me to be invited to teach two three-hour sessions regarding my experiences in the school to a group of foreigners who may be interested in doing social work here in the future. I received good feedback from this presentation. Next month, I have been invited to lead a discussion on the topic of incorporating modern teaching methods into schools for the Indian poor. This discussion is part of an annual day-long workshop for people



*Sandhya playing at school*

working in various non-profit organizations in Banaras. It will be a good chance to network with others who are serving the poor.

There is a good feeling in the school right now. The students are happy to be here and are, by and large, working hard and working together. The school also enjoys a very positive and strong reputation in the community. Thank you so much for your support!

love,  
Connie

<b>2014</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expense</b>
January	510149	191614
February	100914	178952
March	138350	248792
April	99925	172152
May	66902	152900
June	107450	299258
July	254343	278518
August	392061	258764
September	190058	256274
October	516902	251256
<b>Total</b>	<b>2377054</b>	<b>2288480</b>

For those of you who have asked, here is a summary of income and expense since the beginning of the year. Amounts are given in rupees. Approximate dollar amounts can be obtained by dividing by 60. In summary, we have received a total of USD 39,618 and spent a total of USD 38,141. These figures include rent, salaries, school lunch, and other school expenditures as well as funds required for our graduates to attend high school. As you can see, we have been financially stressed for most of the year but right now are in a better financial state with \$1478 in the bank as of the end of October. A big thank you to those of you who helped us keep the school running this year!